

Watergate Years

FROM ITS DETACHED vantage point abroad, the foreign press has often expressed anxiety over its belief that this nation's anguished Watergate ordeal might impose unbearable stresses on its vaunted system of government. The system, it now appears, has not only survived the strain but has emerged from the furnace whole, tempered, and even strengthened.

A history-making transfer of prime executive authority is on the way and the transition will doubtless be dignified and orderly and without the fireworks that generally mark such governmental upheavals abroad.

The inventive wisdom of the founding fathers in prescribing a separation of powers with inbuilt checks and balances has again been demonstrated. The supremacy of the courts in constitutional and legal affairs has been reaffirmed — most recently by the Supreme Court itself in the presidential tapes case. The independence of Congress has been asserted and its power to act against malfeasance in the executive branch has been duly exercised.

THE PRESIDENCY, itself, has been somewhat fortified through a Supreme Court finding that it indeed possesses executive privilege not given it by the Constitution—though that power is not absolute.

And the people. They have invoked and applied their own communal power and found it amply effectual. It is plain that public opinion influenced the course of Watergate events, and in fact dictated the notable outcome. The people reacted violently against abuses of power; they refused to tolerate corruption in high places; they demanded justice and they placed their representatives in Congress on the road toward due reforms in the financing and conduct of elections.

THE WATERGATE YEARS were indeed heavy with storm and strife, with division, discord and shock, and with no little tragedy. But history will record, we think, that their considerable crop of adversity was of the kind that purifies nations as well as men.